

**A REACTION TO THE CONSTRUCTED IDENTITIES OF CONSUMERISM  
AND MASS PRODUCTION:  
CAR CUSTOMIZATION AS A MEDIUM FOR SELF EXPRESSION**

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**A REACTION TO THE CONSTRUCTED IDENTITIES OF CONSUMERISM  
AND MASS PRODUCTION:  
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**ABSTRACT**  
**A REACTION TO THE CONSTRUCTED IDENTITIES OF CONSUMERISM**  
**AND MASS PRODUCTION:**  
**CAR CUSTOMIZATION AS A MEDIUM FOR SELF EXPRESSION**

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MA., Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design  
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Automobiles, since the early years of industrial revolution, have satisfied the increasing need of transportation and speed. Even today they still are the most important and common transportation vehicles for the personal needs. They give the freedom of mobility on an individual level. They cover the driver in the public space giving him/her confidence and the comfort of a home.

But they also represent driver's identity, so the other participants of the traffic interact with the driver through this image represented. Like a second skin over drivers' bodies, automobiles also serve as a form of reflection of the self; they are symbols of status and identity.

This study is an extended proposal to a photographic series consists of portraits of customized automobile owners with their vehicles. It provides a framework for the photographic work and aims to summarize social theories on mass consumer culture and studies that describe automobile both as a symbol and as a commodity.



## ÖZ

### **KİTLESEL ÜRETİMİN KURUGLANMIŞ KÜMLİKLERİNE BİR TEPKİ: KİŞİSEL BİR İFADE BİÇİMİ OLARAK OTOMOBİL MODİFİKASYONLARI**

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Tez Danışmanı: Murat Germen

Otomobiller, endüstri devriminin ilk yıllarından beri artmakta olan taşıma ve hız ihtiyacını karşılamışlardır. Bugün de hala en önemli ve en yaygın kişisel ulaşım aracıdır. Kişisel düzeyde bir hareket özgürlüğü sunmanın yanı sıra, sürücülerine kamusal alanda, adeta ev ortamının güvenliği ve konforunu sağlarlar.

Aynı zamanda sürücülerinin kimliklerini temsil ederler, böylelikle trafiğin diğer katılımcıları, sürücülerle bu temsil üzerinden etkileşime geçerler. Adeta vücudu kaplayan ikinci bir deri gibi otomobiller kişiliğin bir yansıması olarak işlev görürler. Statü ve kimlik sembolüdürler.

Bu çalışma modifiye edilmiş otomobiller ve sahiplerini konu alan bir serisinin plan metni niteliğini taşımaktadır. Söz konusu fotoğraf serisi için bir çerçeve sunmak amacıyla kitle tüketim kültürü üzerine teorileri ve hem sembol hem de ürün olarak otomobilleri ele almaktadır.

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

This work focuses on automobiles and their representation potential of individuals. Today the symbol value of an automobile seems to be more important than its main functionality, the transportation value. This is a result of meanings that are constructed in various media, including advertisements, movies, magazines and video games. It is because of the way the industry offers the package. When you buy a sports race car, it is not possible to not to buy the identifications that society already agreed on like youth, speed, etc. Likewise a SUV represents family life or an off-road vehicle works as a symbol of adventure simultaneously. Above all, these symbolic meanings attached to automobiles are what we consumers enjoy; we choose to consume them as identity prosthesis.

There are thousands of models from various brands in the automobile industry today and each of them claims to provide an unique experience to fit in one of the trending lifestyles. But some drivers/owners find this issue of representation too serious to be left to common tastes of a mass production company. They prefer to customize their vehicles in order to represent their identities.

My photographic series with a typological approach portrays these individuals with their automobiles. Each photograph in itself aims to reveal a potential relation with the driver and the automobile.

In the following sections in order to construct a framework for my project, I have studied and summarized theories on consumerism and automobile as a commodity. Some examples of automobile image in various media are discussed in order to gain a better understanding of the cultural meanings that an automobile could get as an image. Brief analysis of artworks produced on automobiles provide wider and critical perspectives on the issue.

In total this study helped me as a photographer to understand my subjects' ideas and motivations better. This work also aims to expose that motivation behind customizing a car is strongly related to its potential of representation and/or expression of an individual.

## CHAPTER 1: TERMS AND CONCEPTS

### 1.1 Automobility

The term 'automobility' states the analogy in our case - automobile as a representation of the individual self- in a very rich way with its reference to two different meanings. The word *auto* refers to the 'combining element meaning "self, one's own, by oneself," from Gk. *auto-* "self, one's own," and also to the 'shortened form of *automobile* 1899; cf. Fr. *Auto*.'<sup>1</sup>

According to Johny Urry, automobility, the social and technical system of the car, should be examined in six components as, 'manufactured object, individual consumption, machinic complex, quasi-private mobility, culture, and environmental resource-use.'<sup>2</sup> Sub-disciplines of sociology; industrial sociology, sociology of consumption and urban sociology were deficient to examine how automobility, in general cars, transformed the society. The industrial sociology have not been concerned with how the mass production effected and transformed social life. The sociology of consumption, on the other hand, mostly interested in sign-values, the relation between the ownership of the car and the status position of the owner. Lastly, urban sociology subjected the socio-spatial walking practice, replacement of the practice of *flânerie*<sup>3</sup> experiencing the city.

In the case of this study, the most specific and the most important one of these components is '*individual consumption*' with its potential to signify an individual self. "2. the major item of individual consumption after housing which provides status to its owner/user through its sign-values (such as speed, security, safety, sexual desire, career success, freedom, family, masculinity); through being easily anthropomorphized by being given names, having rebellious features, seen to age and so on; and which

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<sup>1</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary. Retrieved May 12, 2012 from [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=auto&searchmode=none](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=auto&searchmode=none)

<sup>2</sup> Urry, John. *The 'System' of Automobility*, Theory Culture Society, October 2004, Sage Publications vol. 21.; p:2

<sup>3</sup> Referring to the behaviour of *flâneur* in the Baudelairian sense as a person who walks the city in order to experience it.

disproportionately preoccupies criminal justice systems (Miller, 2001)"<sup>4</sup> Besides being second most important item of individual consumption after housing (Individual consumption related to communication is becoming as important as housing and transportation today.) automobile, as a commodity, is part of a complex system especially with cultural meanings it could get in society.

In his famous book 'mythologies', Barthes compares Citroen D.S. (reads as *Déesse* in French and means goddess) with Gothic cathedrals in the sense it is consumed by its image by the majority. Even though for people who doesn't own and use it, the car was consumed with its image in the advertisements and magazines. The new D.S. with its innovative design with a streamlined organic form was something like from out of this world.



*Figure 1: 1955 Citroen DS.*

“I think cars today are almost the exact equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals: I mean the supreme creation of an era, conceived with passion by unknown artists, and consumed in image if not in usage

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<sup>4</sup> Urry, John. *The 'System' of Automobility*, p: 26



by a whole population which appropriates them as a purely magical object”<sup>5</sup>

Beyond its extraordinary design Citroen D.S. was similar to the Gothic Cathedrals in the way it was produced and consumed. It was work of a collective, anonymous man’s project and is consumed by a large number of the public like the grand cathedrals of the middle ages.

Margaret Bourke-White's *The Louisville Flood*, 1937 photograph is an iconic image of the situation after Great Depression. Photograph shows a long line of people waiting to be given rations of food from the government. And a billboard image in the background says “World’s highest standard of living,” and shows a happy family travelling somewhere in their car. The right side of the billboard says “There’s no way like the American Way.” The photograph is an intersection point for images that symbolize opposite situations and concepts like poverty and wealth, happiness and depression, etc. The happy, wealthy family that is portrayed in their automobile on the road. The billboard underlines the strong position of automobile image in an ideal American society.



*Figure 2: Margeret Bourke-White, Louisville Flood 1937*

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<sup>5</sup> Barthes, Roland. 1972. *Mythologies*. Vintage, London 2009, p.101

To sum up, even though this research is mostly interested in the *individual consumption* of the car, it is important to keep in mind that automobile is a very complex object and commodity that has a strong connection with the society. It is a sign of status and a symbol for identity with its image. It has transformed society through the years in many ways.

## **1.2 Personalization and Customization**

The terms ‘personalization’ and ‘customization’ are referring to similar concepts and there is still an ongoing debate about their difference in meaning. They could often be used for each other’s place.

In web technology the term personalization refers to usage of computer to serve individual needs of the user, by collecting his/her previous behaviours. It is using technology to accommodate the differences between individuals, changes are based on implicit data, user behaviours are collected as data to serve individual needs.

Personalization is "the ability to provide content and services that are tailored to individuals based on knowledge about their preferences and behaviours" (Adomavicius and Tuzhilin, 2005, p. 84). This definition reflects the common themes across the various definitions of personalization and the various perspectives on personalization. First, personalization is about people and rests in human behaviour. Second, personalization is adaptive (Fan and Poole, 2003, 2006).<sup>6</sup>

Customization is the process in which an individual or a group appropriates a product or practice of another culture and makes it their own. The consumer or the user makes his/her own choices here.

When examining customization within consumerism, the consumer as an individual is seen as self-consciously manipulating the symbolic meanings of given products. According to Campbell in his piece “The Craft Consumer”, this is done by selecting goods with specific intentions in mind to alter them. Campbell argues that

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<sup>6</sup> Hong Sheng, Fiona Fui-Hoon Nah, and Keng Siau, An Experimental Study on Ubiquitous Commerce Adoption: Impact of Personalization and Privacy Concerns, Journal of the Association for Information Systems Vol. 9.Issue 6 (2008), Retrieved from <http://aisel.aisnet.org/jais/vol9/iss6/15>

consumers do this in an attempt to create or maintain their lifestyle or to construct their identity. Instead of accepting a foreign object for what it is, the foreign object is incorporated and changed to fit one's lifestyle and choices.”<sup>7</sup>

In that sense an automobile modification or tuning, is a customization since the choices of user/owner here are direct. He/she chooses a body part or a body colour versus others either they are mass produced modification parts or totally handmade custom parts. There is not a computer technology involved that collects previous choices of the consumer and analyse them to produce the final commodity.

In the case of factory made modifications, like Toyota Scion as one of the first examples, we use the term *mass-customization* which is a system that combines the low unit costs of mass production processes with the flexibility of individual customization.

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<sup>7</sup>Campbell, Colin. *The Craft Consumer*, Journal of Consumer Culture vol.5 no.1 (2005). Retrieved from <http://joc.sagepub.com/content/5/1/23>

## CHAPTER 2:

### 2.1 Social Theories on Consumerism and the Automobile as a Commodity

To understand the notion of automobile consumption better, a brief look at the social theories on consumption and mass culture is essential since automobile is the second most important item of individual consumption after housing.

Marx had seen consumption as the driving force behind capitalism. And for Weber consumption was a way for identifying social status.<sup>8</sup>

Thorstein Veblen was the first to point out consumption as a symbol of social group distinction, where social groups underline their level in social hierarchy with their consumption. He uses the term *conspicuous consumption* as a waste of money and resources by people who want display a higher status.<sup>9</sup> Even though consumption still could be considered as a distinction for social groups today, it is not defining social statuses in a hierarchy as Veblen holds. Today there is a more complex division between subcultures of the postmodern era.

Pierre Bourdieu replaces the judgments of taste inside the social class's predefined borders. In his theory, consumption symbolizes identities but this identity is limited to the social group's learned choices.<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu conceives of consumption as a game of distinction, in which different classes compete for cultural capital or status honour. For him, the automobile is a *distinctive status symbol*, marking off but ultimately misrecognizing the inequalities of class society.<sup>11</sup> Until the early theories that are relating consumption to the individual or personal identity, consumption interpreted as a class symbol or a sign to define social status. Automobile in particular is still could be symbolizing statuses today but predefined choices are not related to social class's tastes, it is possible to see people with lower incomes or from lower socio-economic levels that are interested in luxury cars. But what is distinctive here is the difference between market prices of luxury commodities and low incomes. In the digital era a

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<sup>8</sup> Harvey, Mark. *Between Demand & Consumption: a Framework For Research*, The University of Manchester, January 2011 p:16

<sup>9</sup>Veblen. Thorstein. *Theory of the Leisure Class (1899)* , Oxford University Press, 2007 p:49

<sup>10</sup>Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard College and & Kegan Paul, 1984. p:99-100

<sup>11</sup> Gartman, David. *Three Ages of the Automobile : The Cultural Logics of The Car*, Theory Culture Society 2004 21: 169. Sage publications, p:170

worker with a low income could possibly be interested in a high-end luxury car, could collect many images of it or should be highly conscious about all the technical details, models and specifications of a Porsche or Ferrari. This is a result of wider broadening of the advertisements and market related media.\*

Early automobiles were products of high quality craft and art with their beautiful forms. They were in the reach of high bourgeoisie and the aesthetics of their appearances were as important as their functions. They were instruments of leisure and symbols of wealth. Those early meanings of automobiles are quite parallel with Bourdieu's theory of class distinction.

“Bourdieu argues that in an attempt to accumulate cultural capital for themselves, members of the petite bourgeoisie or middle class seek to appropriate the prestigious goods of the bourgeoisie. But lacking both the economic means and the cultural habitus of the latter, they settle for cheap imitations, which seem satisfactory to them but give away their inferior resources to their class betters.”<sup>12</sup>

This class imitation caused the production of cheaper automobiles with more quantities. Ford's model T was revolutionary with its low prices due to its production method for satisfying needs of petite bourgeoisie. The mass produced cars like Ford model T were designed with a concern with functionality rather than aesthetics and high quality craft. Even though ownership of a automobile in the early 1900 was still a status symbol, when compared with their ancestors, those mass produced models were considered as ugly and lacking of concern for aesthetics. Around 1920's, “one contemporary joke asked why a Model T was like a mistress. The answer: because you hate to be seen on the streets with one.”<sup>13</sup>

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\*Nuri Camli character in “Her Şey Çok Güzel Olacak(Everything's Gonna Be Great (1998)” is a worker with a low income in a drug store but very well-informed with all the details of Ferrari cars. He already bought accessories like driver gloves, even though he may never be able to drive or buy a Ferrari.

<sup>12</sup>Gartman, David. p:172

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p:174



*Figure 3: Ford Model T Coupe 1920.*



*Figure 4: Ford model T assembly line in Detroit.*

With the raise of mass production, starting with Model T in automobile industry, different models from different makes began to increase in numbers. Consumers were not just satisfied with the mere functionality of the mass-produced cheap cars. There was an emerging demand on the stylish aesthetics of luxury cars by the masses. So automobile companies began to produce mass-produced models visually similar to early luxury models. General Motors began to produce mass-produced cars with the style of the luxury cars. Company's head Alfred Sloan hired a coach builder, Harley Earl, whom later became the head of the Styling Section.<sup>14</sup> Sloan instructed Earl to maintain stylistic divisions between models.

“Cadillac was at the high-priced end, followed by Buick, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, then Chevrolet, which occupied the low-priced extreme. There were few differences of real quality between them. All were mass-produced, even the Cadillac, and the different makes shared some of the same components. But styling allowed automakers to differentiate these models and still meet the high-volume demands of mass production.”<sup>15</sup>



*Figure 5: Cadillac 1921.*

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid. p.175

<sup>15</sup>Ibid p.178





*Figure 6: Chevrolet 1920.*

Differentiation of the models was not only serving the tastes of the high culture or bourgeoisie to the middle class. Consumers were also interested in fulfilling their need of individuality and uniqueness that make them seem different from others. Consumers of the mass produced commodities, mostly workers or middle class were object to alienation and exploitation. Sloan and GM also diversified models in time, producing new ones with different little changes every year.

“A second policy devised by Sloan and implemented by GM’s styling department provided consumers with a superficial substitute for another desire denied in production – progress. Sloan knew that consumers wanted not merely different things but also products that were constantly changing in order to symbolize progress. The solution that Sloan devised to deliver symbolic progress was the annual model change. Each year the appearance of every model was slightly changed through the manipulation of the body and accessories, thus giving it a new look. Beneath the surface, however, the mass-produced mechanical parts stayed the same for years. Harley Earl coordinated these annual model changes with the hierarchical differentiation of the makes into an ingenious trickle-down scheme that played upon consumers’ desire not merely



for progress but also for social mobility. In the first year of the cycle, Earl introduced a style feature in the top make of GM's product hierarchy, Cadillac, thus associating it with prestige and high income. In the following year, he transferred it to the next lower make, Buick, thus lending this car some of the Cadillac's prestige. He continued this trickle-down styling in successive years, until the feature reached the cheapest make, Chevrolet, and thus became commonplace, at which time he introduced a new feature at the top, starting the cycle anew. Consumers of the lower makes thus were persuaded that their cars were getting better because they looked more like Cadillacs and, thus, that their lives were getting better as well."<sup>16</sup>

According to David Gartman this era of the automobile industry and automobility is captured by the Theory of the Frankfurt School especially. The Frankfurt School argues that the culture of mass consumption legitimates class differences, not by displaying these differences in a symbolic hierarchy, as Bourdieu holds, but by hiding them altogether.

Theodor Adorno writes "the same thing is offered to everybody by the standardized production of consumption goods" but this is concealed under "the manipulation of taste and the official culture's pretence of individualism".<sup>17</sup>

Frankfurt School also examined the output of the culture industries as a particular manifestation of the workings of capitalist economies. They examined outputs of the cultural industries as a part of mass culture thesis and as corollaries of capitalist economies.

For Adorno in particular, consumer commodities like the automobile *obscure the class relations of their production behind reified facades of mass individuality, giving consumers different quantities of the same illusions to compensate for the denials of mass production.*<sup>18</sup>

Even though most of the brands in the automobile industry differentiate their models for various segments, some brands like Rolls-Royce and Porsche are still choosing to produce only luxury cars with minimum changes in their models. Those brands meet the demands of the consumers with high-income levels similar to early stage of the hand crafted automobile production at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p:170, 179

<sup>17</sup>Adorno, Theodor (1938). *On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening*. The Essential Frankfurt School Reader. Blackwell. p. 280

<sup>18</sup> Gartman, David. p:170

Rolls-royce never produced a lower budget model and made minor changes in its designs. The need for high quality craft as instrument of leisure and symbol of wealth is still current in today's society as Bourdieu points out in his theory of class distinction.

Social theories didn't really emphasize individual choices and the autonomy of the consumer until 1970's. There were two significant shifts that centred individuals in social theories of consumption. First was, the 'cultural revolution' of the 60's and the 70's, the raise of the youth subcultures resisting and reacting dominant ideologies with their expressive styles in consumption. And the second was the rise of the free market ideologies and the distribution of all the new kind of commodities into the daily life.

Around 1980s many social theories were agreeing on consumption as a mechanism that individuals generate personal identities through. Advertisements and several media forms were guiding customers to choose between styles and to construct themselves a lifestyle. Consumption was posited as a realm of 'freedom' to explore and to maintain a lifestyle.<sup>19</sup> But this freedom was problematic, consumers had a responsibility to create their own identity and they had 'no choice but to choose'.<sup>20</sup>

Normative social bonds began to loose with the rise of privatization and individualization. With the increased rates of homeownership and mobility, socio-economic structures began to change, traditional sources of collective identity became to disappear.<sup>21</sup>

Theorists of postmodernism argue that *the diversity and individuality of consumer commodities undermine old class identities by forming the basis for fragmented subcultures. For them the car and its subcultures are part of a fragmented, liberated society of 'difference' that follows the collapse of modernity*"<sup>22</sup>

Consequently individuals are required to construct a reflexive biographical project of the self: "Self identity is not something that is just given but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual. It is

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<sup>19</sup> Bauman, Zygmunt. (1988) *Freedom*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

<sup>20</sup> Giddens, Anthony. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Cambridge: Polity, p:81

<sup>21</sup> Saunders, Peter. *A Nation of Home Owners*, London: Unwin Hyman.

<sup>22</sup> Gartman, David. p:170

the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography.”<sup>23</sup> The concept of a lifestyle was necessary in order to sustain a consistent identity: “A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity.”<sup>24</sup> (Giddens, 1991:81)

“The search for individual identity within a capitalist society that holds out the promise of autonomy but simultaneously denies it in the heteronomy of the economy... The development of the laws of the market over the last century has forced humans into the realm of consumption to satisfy their needs for identity, autonomy and individuality. And the ultimate expression of this compensatory consumption has been the automobile, the individualized means of mobility that has become synonymous with freedom”<sup>25</sup>

This era caused an explosion of diverse auto types, which are testifying to a lifestyle choice. Minivans, retro cars, sports vehicles, multi-purpose vehicles were emerged due to demands of subcultures with different lifestyles for specific leisure interest or identity.

“Well-heeled businessmen appropriated European luxury makes like Mercedes-Benz to individuate themselves. Even working-class youth rejected homogenized American sedans and sought difference and individuality by modifying stock cars, touching off the hot-rod and custom-car subcultures. Some middle-class youth and adults embraced the simple, unchanging Volkswagen as a mark of difference, turning it into the ‘anticar’ in American culture.”<sup>26</sup>

The appropriation of the petite bourgeoisie or the middle class proclaimed mass-produced cars. Similarly, behaviour of the consumer in contemporary society is related to the emergence of craft-consumers and customization.

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<sup>23</sup> Giddens, Anthony. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Cambridge: Polity. p.52,53

<sup>24</sup> Giddens, Anthony, p.81

<sup>25</sup> Gartman, David, p:193

<sup>26</sup> Gartman, David. p:184

## 2.2 The Craft Consumer

The term 'craft' is used to refer to consumption activity in which the 'product' concerned is essentially both 'made and designed by the same person' and to which the consumer typically brings skill, knowledge, judgement and passion while being motivated by a desire for self-expression. *Craft consumer* defines consumers who engage in 'craft consumption' and, hence, of an additional image of the consumer to set alongside those of 'the dupe', 'the rational hero' and the 'postmodern identity-seeker'.<sup>27</sup>

1. "the hero"; consumer as an active, calculating and rational actor, maximizes the utility obtained
2. "the dupe"; passive, manipulated and exploited subject of market forces
3. neither a rational actor nor a helpless dupe, but rather as a self-conscious manipulator of the symbolic meanings that are attached to products, selects goods and use them to create or maintain a given impression, identity or lifestyle
4. "craft consumer" the assumption here is that individuals consume principally out of a desire to engage in creative acts of self-expression

Automobile customizers are mostly part of third customer image above, since they are changing the product to meet their individual needs, tastes or desires. They are not craft consumers because they don't work on the vehicles themselves and they are using mass produced parts and professional repair services. But there are some others which prefer to work on the car themselves as a hobby. Such consumerism seems to oppose to the mass consumption, with its ways of making things precious, special or unique. But it generates demands for other commodities such as the tools that you need for work.

Automobile customizers, either as postmodern identity seekers or as craft consumers, are consumers of today's society. They both have a desire for self-expression through the commodities they consume and they both aim to create an unique image of their identities and lifestyles.

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<sup>27</sup> Campbell, Colin. *The Craft Consumer Culture, Craft and Consumption in a Postmodern Society*, University of York, Sage Publications 2010, p:24

Social theories and academic studies definitely provide detailed and reasonable definitions on the subject. They explain and summarize the behaviours of crowds reasonably. But in order to gain more contemporary and possibly yet veiled meanings that any cultural object could get, popular representations in various media could be good guides. Next chapter put forwards brief analysis of such examples.

## CHAPTER 3:

### 3.1 Examples of Car Representations in Media

This chapter brings together some examples of the automobile image in various media like movies, video games and TV advertisements in order to reflect the cultural meanings that an automobile can get today. There are too many examples on movies, TV advertisements, video games that centres automobiles. Some personify automobiles, give them names and tell their stories while others use cars as a complementary element to portray human characters.

One of the best known early examples of movie series on automobiles, *Herbie* tells the story of a 1963 anthropomorphic Volkswagen Beetle featured in 6 different versions of the film starting from 1968 to 2005. Herbie has a mind of his own and is capable of driving himself. He even falls in love with a Lancia Scorpion in *Herbie Goes to Monte Carlo* (1997).



Figure 7: *Herbie The Love Bug* (1968) Poster.

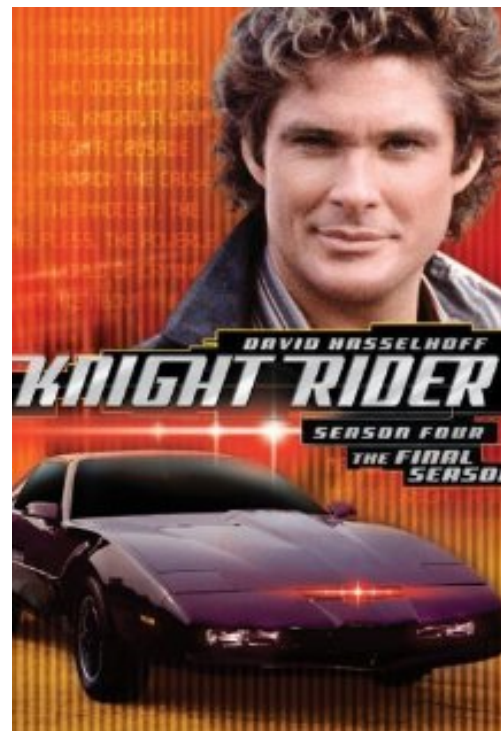


Figure 8: *Knight Rider* (1982–1986) Poster.

1980s Tv series *Knight Rider* on the other hand, as famous as *Herbie* was a mix of sci-fi and western. *KITT*, a high tech customized Pontiac Trans-am is assisting

Michael Knight in his fight against crime. *KITT*, the artificially intelligent car, is able to talk just as a human and even could behave arrogant against its driver sometimes.

*Cars* (2006) and *Cars 2* (2011) is an animation film series produced by Pixar and another example of anthropomorphic automobiles in films. The eyes of the most anthropomorphic cars are usually placed within the headlights but in this film they were placed on the windshield, the characters in the film also use their tires as hands and feet. According to production designer Bob Pauley, this design results a more human like character

“From the very beginning of this project, John had it in his mind to have the eyes be in the windshield. For one thing, it separates our characters from the more common approach where you have little cartoon eyes in the headlights. For another, he thought that having the eyes down near the mouth at the front end of the car made the character feel more like a snake. With the eyes set in the windshield, the point of view is more human-like, and made it feel like the whole car could be involved in the animation of the character.”<sup>28</sup>



*Figure 9: Cars movie poster*

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<sup>28</sup>Cars Production Information . May 5, 2006. Retrieved from <http://adisney.go.com/disneypictures/cars/us/bios/CARSProdNotes.pdf> August, 2012.

A Citroen television advertisement directed by Neill Blomkamp shows a C4 in a car park which suddenly transforms into a metal robot and starts to dance. In the advertisement we see an hi-tech power symbol dancing which is a very human act. As a high technology product the automobile here acts as a human to gain the empathy of the potential customers or drivers.<sup>29</sup>

These films and cars successfully represent the society of their era, the *zeitgeist* we can say. VW Beetle, as a symbol of the youth subcultures is a very specific choice for a movie that made in 1968. A VW beetle race car with feelings is a symbol that many people would like to associate in the late 60s.

Knight Rider's KITT of the 80's also uses the key themes of its era. High tech equipments, artificial intelligence, any kind of spy activities were the main motifs of the cold war era. Moreover, Michael Knight could easily be considered as a stereotype of the 80s fashion with his outfit. His leather jacket, hairstyle and other accessories are the first images that come to mind when we think about 80's men fashion.

Alike Knight Rider, each James Bond film in series offer a customized car that it is an ultimate weapon against crime. High technology is again a very important concept in Bond series and works as a prestigious advertisement for models featured.

Besides these earlier examples, when we look at today's films or games centring automobiles, we see similar concepts among them. Television commercial of Peugeot 206, "The Sculptor" is telling the story of a young Indian that converts a Hindustan Ambassador to a Peugeot 206. He hits the Hindustan Ambassador to a wall, sits an elephant on it to get a replica of Peugeot 206. At the end of the film we see the man with his friends driving and the interest of the people on the street.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Blomkamp, Neill. Citroen C4 advertisement Retrieved from <http://www.visit4ads.com/details.cfm?adid=18560>

<sup>30</sup> Television Advertisement by Giovanni Poro retrieved from [http://wn.com/peugeot\\_206\\_advert\\_the\\_sculptor](http://wn.com/peugeot_206_advert_the_sculptor)





*Figure 10: Still from the television commercial for the Peugeot 206 created by Giovanni Porro*



*Figure 11: Still from the television commercial for the Peugeot 206 created by Giovanni Porro*

“The Sculptor” advertisement tells us that a Peugeot 206 will help you realize your dreams, when you show-off with it on the streets you will get attention, it works as a perfect status symbol. But the advertisement also summarizes and reminds once more, the importance of the look of the automobile.



*Figure 12: Still from the television commercial for the Peugeot 206 created by Giovanni Porro*

All of the films in The Fast and Furious film series have fundamental elements in common, including street racing and car related crimes. Alike the Peugeot advertisement, style of the automobile is as important as ever in the Fast and Furious series, but there are key concepts come out in addition: diversity and uniqueness. With the Fast and Furious film series, we see too many super cars with different colours and designs. Multiracial cast of the each film in series offer many characters accompanied by unique super cars.



Figure 13: Fast 2 Furious Desktop Wallpaper.



Figure 14: Fast 2 Furious Desktop Wallpaper.



Figure 15: 2 Fast 2 Furious Desktop Wallpaper.



Figure 16: 2 Fast 2 Furious Desktop Wallpaper.

Need For Speed (NFS)\* is a series of racing video games published by Electronic Arts. In the game, player can choose different cars on various tracks and race

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\*Video Game by Electronic Arts <http://www.ea.com/nfs>

modes. Since *The Need for Speed: Underground* (2003) edition, an important part of the gameplay is on tuner culture. And with its story line, characters, automobiles and gameplay, it offers a kind of visual simulation of the Fast and Furious films. Player within the storyline can earn points and money from street races and could use them to upgrade to different customization of both performance based and visual parts. Player can upgrade the car's engine, drivetrain, suspension, tires, engine control unit (ECU) as well as add nitrous oxide, turbo chargers, and reduce the car's weight. There are parts in game that player/driver had to escape from pursuit of police cars and helicopters, a way of doing that is to change the body colour or some parts of the car in a repair shop nearby. All races take place in a generic city at night.



Figure 17: Screenshot from the Video Game Need For Speed: Underground.



Figure 18: Need For Speed: Underground Poster.

Another video game series that centres automobile related crime Grand Theft Auto (GTA), starting from 1997, has 10 different versions and 4 expansion packs. The gameplay in each version focuses on a storyline engaging activities including action-adventure, driving, role-playing and racing related crime. In game, players take the role of a criminal trying to rise in organized crime and while completing missions given by the underworld mafia leaders including assassinations and street racing. The game has been under criticism since its first release because of including general violence and crime, ethnic discrimination, sex mini game, drunk driving, drug dealing and full frontal



nudity. It has been blamed for inspiring murders and woundings. The production company Rockstars Games had been found guilty and a \$246 million lawsuit filed by the parents of a man killed in a random shooting in 2003 in USA. Two teens who shot two young people claimed their actions were inspired by GTA III<sup>31</sup>

### **3.2 Selected Examples of Contemporary Artworks Involving Automobiles**

There are too many artists and artworks that matter automobile directly. Examples mentioned here aim to provide the multi dimensional views of various artists using different mediums and approaches. Naturally artworks offer a more critical view on automobility than high-budget hollywood productions.

An exhibition opened in Museum Tinguely, Basel in 2011, “Car Fetish. I drive therefore I am” collects a large selection of various artworks produced in the past 100 years. More than 80 artists featured in the exhibition and in the 300 pages catalogue.

The exhibition consists of works belong to various styles and movements, including works of Futurists, Giacomo Balla and Luigi Russolo; and American Pop Artists like Andy Warhol (“Disaster Series,” “Cars”), Ed Ruscha, John Chamberlain, Robert Rauschenberg, Mel Ramos, Roy Lichtenstein and Don Eddy; also many European artists and the Nouveau Réalisme movement exemplified by the works of Arman, César, Gérard Deschamps, Mimmo Rotella and Jean Tinguely that transformed the commodities of machine and automobile into art. Wolf Vostell (“Das Theater ist auf der Strasse”) and Allan Kaprow, two of the main figures in Happening and Performance Art have been chosen for the exhibition. Allan Kaprow’s 1961 “Yard,” made of towering stacks of tires, has been restaged for the show.

Works and artists included are considering issues in the topics of commodity fetishism (Ant Farm, Arman, Edward Burtynsky, Jan Dibbets, Hans Hansen, Peter Keetman, Len Lye, Hendrik Spohler, Peter Stämpfli and Patrick Weidmann), religious fetishism(auto da fé, “Déesse,” nail fetish and car cemetery) with works by Kudjoe Affutu, Chris Burden, Jordi Colomer, Walker Evans, Jitish Kallat, Annika Larsson,

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<sup>31</sup>CNN.com, Lawsuit filed against Sony, Wal-Mart over game linked to shootings October, 2003. Retrieved from [http://web.archive.org/web/20060625114709/http://www.cnn.com/2003/LAW/10/22/vid\\_eogame.lawsuit.ap/index.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20060625114709/http://www.cnn.com/2003/LAW/10/22/vid_eogame.lawsuit.ap/index.html) July 2012

Superflex and Dale Yudelman;) and sexual fetishism(phallic extension, motor potency, female curves, the car as bachelor machine) with works by Liz Cohen, Sylvie Fleury, Wenyu Ji, Allan Kaprow, Richard Prince, Pipilotti Rist, Bruno Rousseaud and Franck Scurti) Themes such as accident, speed, traffic are included in the works of others including many photographers as well (Jacques-Henri Lartigue, Robert Frank, Brassai ). Ahmet Ögüt is also among the artists took part in the exhibition with his work entitled, Somebody Else's Car.<sup>32</sup>

### **Andrew Bush, Vector Portraits (1989-1997):**

The “Vector Portraits” are photographs of people in their cars that Andrew Bush took while driving side by side at the freeway. He photographs his subject in a specific moment, while they are driving on the way, in a mood of concentration driving causes.



66 Drives

*Figure 19: 66 Drives, Andrew Bush.*

The technique he repeatedly use for every image within the series, a medium format camera at the passenger seat and a strobe at the back seat<sup>33</sup>, results a typological

<sup>32</sup>Wetzel, Roland. *Car Fetish. I drive therefore I am exhibition catalogue*, Museum Tinguely, Basel, and Kehrer Verlag Heidelberg, Berlin, 2011

<sup>33</sup>Bush, Andrew. *Vector Portraits*, Exhibition at Yossi Milo Gallery, 2009. Retrieved from [http://www.yossimilo.com/exhibitions/2009\\_04-andr\\_bush/](http://www.yossimilo.com/exhibitions/2009_04-andr_bush/)

series. The diversity of the car models and drivers and their unpredictability results a rich narrative within each image. They reveal a connection between the way drivers and the cars look. Automobiles that framed their drivers help us to define, to classify those people we are facing at. A detailed caption under each image with the dates and exact time details and also locations and directions invites viewer to construct his/her own narrative. Those exact details, refer to most characteristic task of a photograph to mark a specific time in space.



*Figure 20: Woman heading west at 71 mph on Interstate 44 outside Rolla, Missouri, at 11-43 a.m. in January 1991. Andrew Bush*



*Figure 21: High school students facing north at 0 mph on Sepulveda Boulevard in Westwood, California, at 3-01 p.m. on a Saturday in February 1997, Andrew Bush.*



*Figure 22: Someone's son traveling northbound at 60 mph on U.S. Route 101 near SantaBarbara at 1-55 p.m. in August 1993, Andrew Bush.*



*Figure 23: Woman waiting to proceed south at Sunset and Highland boulevards, Los Angeles, at approximately 11-59 a.m. one day in February 1997, Andrew Bush.*

### Arnold Odermatt

Swiss police photographer Arnold Odermatt's work was also in the exhibition *Car fetish: I drive therefore I am*. Odermatt's photographs he took from 1948 until his retirement in 1990 shows scenes of car crashes.<sup>34</sup> First purpose of those photographs was to document the accident for police reports and insurance companies but Odermatt's skill and perfectionism were beyond this. His photographs, with precisely chosen vantage points provide the information how the accident happened particularly. The lack of injured or dead people or ambulances in photographs, beautiful compositions of rural landscapes and sculpture like forms of crashed automobiles, result images that are enjoyable to watch. At the same time they are scenes of car crashes some, possibly including death or injuries, they also offer a strong, concrete, raw representation of reality.



Figure 24: Oberdorf, 1964, from the series *Karambolage*, Arnold Odermatt.

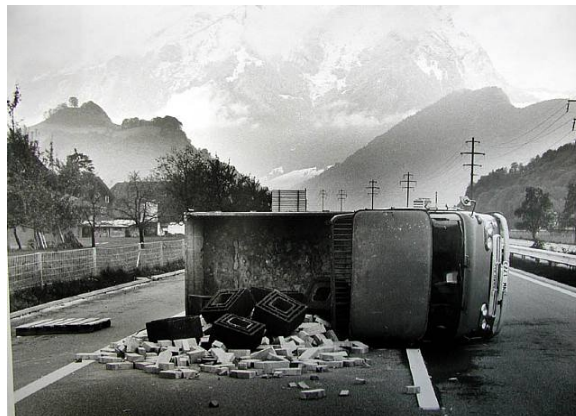


Figure 25: Stans, 1973, Arnold Odermatt.

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<sup>34</sup>Higgle, Jennifer. *Always Crashing in the Same Car* Frieze magazine Issue 73, 2003  
Retrieved from [http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/always\\_crashing\\_in\\_the\\_same\\_car/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/always_crashing_in_the_same_car/)



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### **Superflex, Burning Car:**

Burning Car is a 11 minutes film work in which a car is being set on fire. The empty car starts to burn, the cabin is filled with smoke and fire, car-paint is bobbling and tires explode. Towards the end of the film the car is burned out completely. Burning Car was made for a solo exhibition at De Vleeshal, Middelburg, curated by Christie Arends. No longer only an image of protest and revolt in war-torn regions and dictatorships far beyond our shores, the burning car has become an image from the suburbs of 'civilised' Europe – a symbol of the difficult relationship between Western societies and their changing populations.<sup>35</sup>



*Figure 26: Burning Car by Superflex.*

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<sup>35</sup>Superflex, *Burning Car* 2008 Retrieved from [http://superflex.net/tools/burning\\_car](http://superflex.net/tools/burning_car)



### Fluxus artist George Brecht, Motor Vehicle Sundown.

Motor Vehicle Sundown is a concert in which cars are the instruments. Conducted by another Fluxus artist, Larry Miller, the owners of the cars honked, operated the flasher, revved up the engines, and slammed the doors to the amusement of the audience. Among the cars that participated in the “concert” was also Jean Tinguely’s Lotus race car that is normally exhibited together with Eva Aeppli’s Five Widows sculpture in the museum.<sup>36</sup>



*Figure 27: Car Concert Motor Vehicle Sundown By George Brecht*



*Figure 28: Car Concert Motor Vehicle Sundown By George Brecht*

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<sup>36</sup>Brecht, George *Motor Vehicle Sundown*. Conducted by Museum Tinguely, Basel. Solitude Park, Basel / Switzerland, 2011. Retrieved from <http://vernissage.tv/blog/2012/02/10/george-brecht-motor-vehicle-sundown-at-museum-tinguely-remix/>

### Covered Cars 1998-2010 by Todd Sanchioni

Covered Cars is series that photographer Todd Sanchioni collects photographs of parked, covered cars in different environments. For his series Sanchioni each photograph in the series takes a different meaning depending on the viewer, the car, the location and the mood and character of the shrouded vehicle.<sup>37</sup> His work is a combination of two different approaches we can say; obsessive collecting behaviour of a typological approach and the daily encounters of a street photographer. Photographer himself also referring to masters of those two different approaches like Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander and Bend & Hilla Becher when defining his work.



*Figure 29: Covered Cars, 1998-2010 by Todd Sanchioni.*

<sup>37</sup>Schuman, Aaron. *On the Road*. Seesaw Magazine Issue 13, 2010 Retrieved from <http://www.seesawmagazine.com/coveredcarspages/coveredcarsintro.html>

### **Thomas Mailaender: Cathedral Cars**

Thomas Mailaender is a French multimedia artist based in Paris and Marseille. His work *Cathedral Cars* also featured in *Car Fetish exhibition*, consist of photographs of cars traveling aboard ships from Marseilles to North Africa. Another typological approach on automobiles, marking a human condition. In spite of the simplicity of the images, too many information layers are attached to the work, like with the models of the cars, belongings loaded to the cars and specific situation of transporting from Europe to Africa.



*Figure 30: Cathedral Cars by Thomas Mailaender.*



*Figure 31: Cathedral Cars by Thomas Mailaender.*



*Figure 32: Cathedral Cars by Thomas Mailaender.*



*Figure 33: Cathedral Cars by Thomas Mailaender.*

### Masaru Tatsuki, Decоторa

Japanese photographer Masaru Tatsuki spent ten years to produce his series Decоторa (short for decorated trucks) with the truck drivers and their vehicles. His style and the technique is not as specific as the tradition of Becher's but there are many common points in his photographs like most of them being shot at night time.



*Figure 34: "Midnight Emperor" Shiga 2002 by Masaru Tatsuki.*

## CONCLUSION

Either in visual productions or in real life automobiles have a strong potential to reflect the culture or the individual they belong. This is because we as consumers choose to value and use them with their sign values as much as their functionalities. Obviously the automobile image in various media, raised the interest in automobile modification culture and caused a synchronous spread of customization culture worldwide. But this boom of modified, customized automobiles is also due to a need of individual expression of uniqueness.

It doesn't seem possible to scientifically prove and document the motivation behind customization behaviour, and this study doesn't aim to do so. But when brought together; the social theories on consumerism and the cultural meanings of the car, lead us to the relation of the corollaries of mass consumerism and the need for individual expression through consumption.

The main purpose of the photographic series *Faça/Facade*, is to portray the reflections of customization culture in Turkey. As a photographer my main motivation is to recognize and to understand the individuals inside these automobiles that demand a continuous attention of the crowd. I have invited them to pose out of their vehicles.

With the preferred typological approach within series I intend to put forward these automobiles' designs. I bring and catalogue them together in order to underline the similarities and diversities. With the repetition at the production method of the photographs and the identical view points and framings I intend to refer to the mass production in general. Typological classification is a method that consumerist systems use often. The motivation of uniqueness and notion of customization seem to be in contradiction with such an approach, but I believe this unpretentious manner of single photographs will bring forward unique aesthetics of each automobile and personal characteristics of their owners. With the lighting and the specific view point in photographs I aimed to visualize the automobiles similar to they are represented in commercial advertisements. The lighting difference between ambient, automobile and subject divides these three into layers and hopefully causes a comparison.

The relation between these automobiles, their owners and the environments they are in hopefully give a rise to various interpretations on the concepts of identity, representation and consumption.

At the production phase of the series, I photographed 12 automobile owners, contacted many more through the web. My intention was to choose the unique and highly customized designs. I tried to include a variety of brands and price ranges of automobiles in series. Popular Fiat designs with their Turkish models like Doğan, Şahin and Turkish brands like Anadol are missing in series and should be included in the next edit of 40 images. I am also willing to add photographs women custom automobile drivers at the next phase of the project. There is a lack of women drivers or owners of customized automobiles in series. Even though we see a raise in the number of women drivers in traffic or women car racers in Turkey, car customization still seems to be a masculine issue.

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Video Game by Electronic Arts <http://www.ea.com/nfs>

Television Advertisement by Giovanni Poro retrived from  
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## APPENDIX

FaçaFacade. Photographs, 120\*80 cm Digital Ink Jet Prints



Berk, 1991 TransAm, Atatürk Oto Sanayi, Maslak





Cem, Honda CivicSarıyer



Demir, 2011 Porsche GT3Autodrom, Tuzla





Deniz, Lotus EvoraİstanbulPark, Tuzla



Emre, B c kmobil, Bostancı



Emre, Jetta, Emirgan





Nihat, Muza, Beylikdüzü





Fatih, Civic, Beylikdüzü



Gökhan, HondaSakarya



Onur, 1963 VW, Merter



Yusuf, Tipo, Bayrampaşa



## Installation Views Fass Art Gallery



